

THE FIRST RECORD OF THE NORTHEASTERN RACE OF THE NORTHERN RED BISHOP
EUPLECTES FRANCISCANUS FOR KENYA

Due to an oversight, Britton (1980) treated the Northern Red Bishop as a monotypic species (P.L. Britton *in litt.*). This note reports the finding of the distinctive Ethiopian and Somali race *pusillus* in Kenya for the first time.

On 25 March 1978 D.R. Waugh and I located a small group of *Euplectes franciscanus*, comprising two males and three females, 40 km north of Marsabit town on the edge of the Dida Galgalla desert (2.40°N, 38.05°E). They were identified as of the race *pusillus* on account of the orange in the plumage of the males as opposed to the red-orange of nominate birds from the Baringo area (pers. obs.) and from Uganda (National Museum, Nairobi, collection).

Britton (1980) gives the range of nominate *franciscanus* in Kenya as an "apparently disjunct population in and around the rift valley ... from Elgeyu and Eldama Ravine east to the N Uaso Nyiro River, including Lakes Baringo and Bogoria." The Marsabit birds were some 300 km northeast of the rift valley lakes mentioned by Britton but only 200 km south of the type locality of *pusillus* at Lake Stephanie, in southern Ethiopia.

J.S. Ash (*in litt.*) has a recent breeding record from Ethiopia at 4.30°N, 36.30°E, just west of Lake Stephanie and sight records from further east at 4.30°N, 37.30°E (Ethiopia) and 4.00°N, 42.00°E, east of Mandera on the Ethiopia/Somalia border.

In conjunction with the above sighting it is worth noting that exceptional numbers of Fire-fronted Bishops *E. diadematus* occurred in eastern Kenya during 1978, particularly in March and April (pers. obs. and *Scopus* 5: 116). Outside Kenya and northeastern Tanzania *diadematus* is only found in Somalia south of 3°N (J.S. Ash, *in litt.*), and records of wandering examples of this species as far west as Marsabit (Britton 1980) could thus be of Somali origin.

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We are sorry for the late appearance of this note. Ed.

RANGE EXTENSION AND POPULATION INCREASE OF THE HOUSE SPARROW IN KENYA

The Indian race of the House Sparrow *Passer domesticus indicus* has been known for many years as an introduced species in Mombasa (van Someren 1932). This note describes the recent rapid population increase of these birds and their extension of breeding range inland, and discusses their potential for further extension to Nairobi.

The population increase of the House Sparrow in and around Mombasa is evident from the records given here. Initially van Someren (1932) reported the presence of the bird in Mombasa, but Jackson's (1938) comment on the lack of supporting specimens may well have prompted Mackworth-Praed & Grant (1960) to describe its presence there merely as 'probable'. Its rarity in the town in earlier years, despite the presence of ample, apparently suitable habitat, was noted by Forbes-Watson (1972), who could trace no record subsequent to van Someren's (1932) report, and who considered its continued presence there to be uncertain. Similarly, McVicker (1982) did not personally see the species until 1981, despite being resident in Mombasa from 1953 and a frequent visitor to the dock area between 1953 and 1961, though other observers reported the

occasional single bird or pair to him from 1973 onwards.

In 1979, however, small numbers were 'established' in the old town, docks and causeway areas of Mombasa (East African Bird Report 1979), while by February of the following year five or six pairs were breeding in Moi International Airport (East African Bird Report 1980). The most noteworthy expansion of 1980 was D.A. Turner's record of several at Mariakani (3.52S, 39.28'E) on 20 August, which represented an extension of approximately 30 km inland (East African Bird Report 1980).

During 1981, McVicker (1982) observed a flock of 25-30 at the airport in May, and also recorded several in October around the Manor Hotel and Moi Avenue in Mombasa itself; finally, during December, he noted a spread of the species to the vicinities of Mombasa Hospital and Bamburi, though he considered this expansion to have subsequently been arrested by adverse weather conditions.

By May 1982, however, Cunningham-van Someren (1982) noted at least 100 individuals at the airport, and also numbers around the Manor Hotel and the Kenya Meat Commission building. There was widespread nest construction at the airport, where the birds had become a serious pest that required deployment of a small labour force to dispose of both their droppings and their numerous nests: the species was considered to be 'firmly established' on Mombasa island and its outskirts.

Following these population and range increases, a further more radical range extension has occurred. On 12 August 1982, H. Gomez de Silva observed a pair feeding young at the Caltex petrol station on the main A109 Nairobi-Mombasa road on the outskirts of Voi (3.23'S, 38.34'E). The young birds were not visible, but were heard calling loudly from the nest hole (EANHS Nest Record Card and HGDS *in litt.*). This record represented a range extension of about 110 km northwest from Mariakani, and an extension of known breeding range of approximately 140 km inland from Mombasa.

There are four subsequent records of the species from this petrol station. D.A. Turner (pers. comm.) observed a male there on 11 November 1982. Four days later, I watched a pair flying around the station's buildings: the nest site was not detected, but the presence of other young was demonstrated by the female depositing a faecal sac on the garage forecourt. The male made several foraging trips to the edge of the *shambas* directly behind the garage, and was ignored by several Grey-headed Sparrows *P. griseus* in the near vicinity. Despite a prolonged search, I was unable to locate any further individuals, so that the fate of the August brood remains obscure, though very high infant mortality is a characteristic of this species (Penny 1974).

A month later, on 23 December, H. Gomez de Silva (*in litt.*) again recorded young at the petrol station, this time in a nest under the roof of the vehicle inspection pit. The female was feeding the brood, and two adult males were in the near vicinity. Four days later, the same observer revisited the garage and, in addition to the nestlings still being fed, observed one of the males constructing another nest under the same roof. This production of at least three broods in just over four months is typical of the species in India, where from three to six broods per season are reared, depending on the climate and the availability of food for the insectivorous young (Penny 1974).

The mode of range extension involved here appears to conform to a well established pattern. Most bird species successfully introduced on to continents initially become established in coastal towns, because these constitute the single environmental niche that may be left vacant by the indigenous species: thus the more successful introduced species are often those that are commensals of man (Forbes-Watson 1972). All but one of the sites mentioned by Mackworth-Praed & Grant (1960) as having been colonized by the House Sparrow are on the coast and have large docks, or at least harbours. The single exception is Khartoum, in the Sudan, which is an inland port and trade centre

via the Nile. The deliberate introduction of this species as a cage bird seems unlikely due to its rather drab appearance and harsh, noisy character. Instead, it seems much more likely that, as a facet of its well known familiarity with man and his surroundings, it has come aboard ships at ports in India and Arabia, possibly in search of nesting sites, and then left the vessels to colonize the habitations around their ports of call. In view of the species' nesting attempts actually inside aeroengines, on the Comoros early in the last decade (D.A. Turner pers. comm.) and at Kenana in the Sudan during October 1982 (F. Alexander in litt.), it is quite easy to envisualize the inadvertent imprisonment of individuals in ships' cargo holds, with release only when the holds were opened in port for off-loading. Penny (1974) presumed introduction of the species on to the Amirantes to have been accidental, possibly via a shipload of rice from Africa.

The current mode of range extension in Kenya seems to be related to this ship-borne method. Random dispersal from Mombasa appears unlikely since, with the single exception of a female 20 km to the south near Tiwi (4.14'S, 39.36'E) on 19 December 1982 (C. Briffett pers. comm.), the species has yet to be reported from other apparently suitable settlements along the coast. However, both Mariakani and Voi are on the main Nairobi-Mombasa road and railway links, and it seems likely that the birds are being transported in heavy road vehicles or, more probably, in trains. Given the penetration of aircraft engines mentioned above, individuals could easily enter railway freight wagons, to be released when the cars are opened at a station. A search of the railway stations and heavy vehicle stopping places between Mombasa and Voi may well disclose further populations of sparrows. In this connection, there is an unconfirmed record from Mtito Andei (2.41'S, 38.10'E) - a locality which straddles the road and the railway (per D.A. Turner).

The remaining question is, of course, whether the House Sparrow will continue its presumably assisted advance up the railway and/or roads to enter Nairobi, where the abundance of nesting sites and food might produce a dramatic population increase which, in view of the events at Mombasa's airport, could be the cause of considerable expense to the civic authorities. Though Nairobi appears remote from Voi in both distance and altitude, a chance train-assisted passage could bridge the distance in hours. Periodic searches of the environs of Nairobi railway station appear worthwhile since eradication is known to be extremely difficult after a breeding population of any size has been established (Penny 1974).

The potential for competition from highland species is uncertain, but is worth considering since an introduction of the House Sparrow on to the Seychelles in 1965 may have failed due to competition with the ubiquitous Madagascar Fody *Foudia madagascariensis*, which is similarly common around human settlements and commensal with man (Penny 1974). The House Sparrow appeared to coexist peacefully with the Grey-headed Sparrow at Voi, but has yet to make contact with the more closely related Rufous Sparrow *P. motitensis* of higher altitudes. However, the Rufous Sparrow does not show so great a preference for human habitations so that a niche for the House Sparrow may well be available in urban Nairobi.

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A RECORD OF THE GREY-CRESTED HELMET SHRIKE NEAR NAIVASHA, KENYA

The Grey-crested Helmet Shrike *Prionops poliolorpha* is endemic to Kenya and Tanzania, and has recently attracted comment due to its range fluctuations and erratic occurrence; of particular interest have been its extension of range northwards to the Nakuru area, and the fact that it was not recorded in the Naivasha area, the type locality, between 1926 and 1979 (Lewis 1981, 1982). A second recent record for the Naivasha area is reported here.

T. Stevenson (pers. comm.) observed a flock of seven individuals flying across the new Naivasha-Nakuru road, 19 km north of Naivasha town, on 2 November 1982. Having been initially detected in flight, the birds were followed and watched perched in a low bush, to confirm the identification.

Lewis (1981) suggested that the species might reach Nakuru during post-reproductive dispersal from its breeding grounds in the Kenya-Tanzania border region. Since all available breeding indications are in April-May (Fischer & Reichenow 1884, Jackson 1901, Betts 1966), this view was supported by the other post-1926 record from the Naivasha-Kedong area, the flock on 21 July 1979, at Mt Longonot (Lewis 1982). On this basis, the November date of this latest record appears too late in the year for a post-breeding movement, but does provide a further example of a foraging party in the eastern rift, within the October-February range of the recent Nakuru sightings.

The occurrence of *P. poliolorpha* at Naivasha is certainly a very uncommon phenomenon since, while Lewis (1981) suggested misidentification as the Helmet Shrike *P. plumata* as one potential reason for the general paucity of records of *P. poliolorpha*, the very numerous species lists for the Naivasha area contributed to the Kenyan bird atlas scheme (Lewis & Pomeroy in prep.) do not mention either species.

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